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# Montgomery County, Johns Hopkins University sign deal to improve biotech activity

Washington Business Journal - by [Vandana Sinha](#) Senior Staff Reporter

Montgomery County and **Johns Hopkins University** signed a memorandum of understanding Wednesday to find ways to beef up the county's biotech sector.

The two parties will begin to meet semiannually to ensure the county's biotech industry remains competitive. They plan to identify academic research that the university can advance and the county can use to attract more complementary private-sector companies.

The new agreement comes with a backdrop of new Montgomery County initiatives to renew its commitment to biotech. After unveiling a **pumped-up strategy** drafted by a county biosciences task force late last year, county leaders have begun pushing forward on some of those to-do items, including introducing legislation that would create a **county version** of Maryland's tax credit program for angel investors of biotech.

The biosciences task force had also listed such university partnerships as a goal to convert more faculty and scientific research into corporate licensing and commercialization deals. Johns Hopkins is annually among the largest recipients of federal National Institutes of Health research funding, though the university's ability to commercialize much of that research has long been a source of criticism.

The county MOU with Johns Hopkins University was also highlighted by Montgomery County Councilmember Mike Knapp, D-District 2, in his **own strategy** to increase economic development activity around life sciences.

"This MOU with John Hopkins — in addition to other recent initiatives — reaffirms our commitment to ensuring Montgomery County remains a national leader in the biosciences," Knapp said in a statement announcing the partnership. "It is critical to have this type of scientific commitment from one of the world's premiere research institutions in order to implement a biosciences strategy that will enable our community to lead the way in improving human health throughout the world. The strength of our relationship with Johns Hopkins is also key to attracting and retaining talented life sciences professionals in our community."

This isn't the first time the two parties have intersected in matters of biotech-related economic development. Montgomery donated the land to the university that now lies beneath its Rockville campus on Medical Center Drive. While that campus now includes three buildings, JBG Cos. separately **announced Wednesday** that it plans to construct two buildings totaling 575,000 square feet for new consolidated National Cancer Institute headquarters on that Rockville campus.

In addition, Johns Hopkins' proposed **Belward research campus** is a key element of a planned "Science City," an up to 20 million-square-foot mix of federal, academic, office, lab, retail and residential development that the county hopes to build in the western end of Gaithersburg, but has drawn the ire of nearby residents.

Under one of the new MOU's tenets, a Johns Hopkins senior management representative will serve on a county-created life sciences body, while a county executive designee will serve on a strategic university committee.

"The parties intend that the MOU be the beginning of greater collaboration and communication," the document reads. "The parties believe that their respective interests will benefit from cross-representation."

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